

Santa Monica Daily Press

A newspaper with issues

DAILY LOTTERY

SUPER LOTTO

1 11 16 29 39
Meganumber: 13
Jackpot: \$19 Million

NEWS OF THE WEIRD BY CHUCK SHEPARD

■ Maria Julia Mantilla, recently crowned Miss World, denied a plastic surgeon's boast that he had given her buttock implants and trimmed her ears, protesting that "I'm not the creation of a surgeon. He just did my bust and my nose."

■ Wailing loudly and apparently incredulous at being ordered to jail, a scantily dressed Natalia McLennan, 25, was taken directly to a lockup from a New York City courtroom in September, after being charged with prostitution; McLennan had recently posed for the cover of New York magazine, proclaiming herself to be the city's top-grossing "escort" and acknowledging that she provided sex for clients.

■ Transsexual convicted prostitute Monica Renee Champion, 37, was finally picked up by police in Richmond, Va., in August; there had been arrest warrants for indecent exposure against her in the city's South Side as a male and in the city's North Side as a female.

■ Tyrone D. McMillian, 33, who was arrested after a high-speed chase through three New York towns in August, told the arresting officers: "I've been playing a lot of Grand Theft Auto and NASCAR on PlayStation. I thought I could get away."

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is the 306th day of 2005.
There are 59 days left in the year.

On Nov. 2, 1947, Howard Hughes piloted his huge wooden flying boat, the Hughes H-4 Hercules (popularly known as the "Spruce Goose"), on its only flight, which lasted about a minute over Long Beach Harbor in California.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If I have done any deed worthy of remembrance, that deed will be my monument. If not, no monument can preserve my memory."

AGESILAUS II
KING OF SPARTA (CIRCA 444-360 B.C.)

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Officials getting veterans' backs

Move afoot to thwart private development of VA site

BY RYAN HYATT

Daily Press Staff Writer

VA GROUNDS — Officials caution that battle-weary American service personnel returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq may have one less place to turn for support, if private developers gain access to the West Los Angeles veteran's grounds.

Political leaders throughout the Southland are mobilizing support so the West Los Angeles Veteran Administration's 387-acre campus will continue to assist American servicemen and women in the future, after a recent report issued by a consultant suggests several "abandoned" and "underutilized" buildings on the site may be liquidated to create private medical

research facilities, high-rise condos and retail stores.

The VA is re-evaluating the use of its facilities nationwide in order to modernize its health care system, according to officials. As a result, the VA leadership in Washington may be tempted by developers to put portions of the West LA grounds on the auction block to create a revenue source

See **BACKING VETS**, page 6

Veterans answer call to combat land grab

BY CAROLYN SACKARIASON

Daily Press Staff Writer

BRENTWOOD — A group of veterans has enlisted a growing faction of residents here to fight the federal government in its potential plans to turn what was supposed to be a therapeutic community for soldiers returning from war into a development that could be equivalent in size of three Century cities.

That's according to Jessica Landry, a Vietnam Vet and a member of Citizens for Veteran Rights, a group that represents more than 1,000 veteran groups in the area and has the support of residents who live near the Veterans' Administration site in West Los Angeles.

While there is some support to commercially develop the 387-acre site, it appears that those who oppose it are becoming more vocal. Hundreds of residents and business leaders voiced their opposition at a meeting last month over a report released by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which detailed possibilities of commercial development, including medical research facilities or high-rise condominiums.

The Citizens for Veteran Rights are now tapping into that opposition, waging a grassroots campaign to battle the powers that be in Washington.

"We know it's going to be a fight," Landry said. "People say that you walk into a brick wall when you deal with the VA. We are trained to walk into brick walls ... we don't intend not to succeed."

With the help of neighborhood councils and local businesses in Brentwood, including the Chamber of Commerce, the Citizens for Veteran Rights have launched a card-signing campaign that will land directly on the desk of VA Secretary

See **ANSWER CALL**, page 5

Not giving a parishioner his props



Derek Goes/Special to the Daily Press

A small group of protesters sound off in front of St. Monica's Church on Tuesday, opposing propositions placed on the Nov. 8 election ballot. The propositions were introduced by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a member of the church.

Back to drawing board for Bus Barn developer

BY RYAN HYATT

Daily Press Staff Writer

VENICE BUS BARN — A private developer has agreed to change his plans to turn an under-used bus yard into a high-density condominium complex until more people support it.

Representatives with RAD Jefferson, LLC, informed community members last week they will re-visit a proposal to erect a 214-

unit condominium complex and retail center at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's bus yard site, located at 100 E. Sunset Ave. By doing so, they hope the project they ultimately push for will have more community support, they said.

A public hearing with the Los Angeles Planning Commission, set to have taken place on Oct. 27, was put off at RAD's request so the developer might begin to con-

sider community concerns that have been raised over the project.

"We want to be a good neighbor and work with the community so there is more consensus," said Melissa Sweeney, RAD spokeswoman.

Sweeney did not specify when RAD would be ready to move forward with the project, indicating more meetings with community

See **RAD REPLY**, page 7

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Santa Monica Daily Press

JACQUELINE BIGAR'S STARS The stars show the kind of day you'll Have:
★★★★-Dynamic ★★★★★-Positive ★★★★★-Average ★★-So-so ★-Difficult

 **ARIES (March 21-April 19)**
★★★★ Though others mean well, they seem to only add to the present confusion. If someone else wants to run the show, let him. You will be better off seeking your own facts. Don't lose your temper — it won't help, and you will regret this display later. Tonight: Go along with another's idea.

 **TAURUS (April 20-May 20)**
★★★★ Your temper might come out despite the fact that you would prefer to handle a matter differently. You can be sure you don't know the whole story. Someone adds to the confusion. Tonight: Either say yes or do your own thing.

 **GEMINI (May 21-June 20)**
★★★★ You might want to focus on work and getting the job done. If retired, you might have other projects that you would like to clear out. You aren't getting all the facts. Confusion could lead to frustration. Tonight: Find a stress-buster.

 **CANCER (June 21-July 22)**
★★★★★ You need to think before you leap, especially if the situation surrounds a friend, long-term goal or finances. You might want to write down your ideas and check them out at a later date. Tonight: Add fun and games to your life.

 **LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)**
★★ Maintain a low profile. You might not be seeing a situation clearly, or someone might be deceiving you. A boss or someone you need to answer to could be difficult and demanding. What a great day to vanish! Tonight: Run home.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)
★★★★ You might have the best intentions, communicating could take the maximum. Please be aware that someone is playing devil's advocate. Use this person's argumentative streak positively. Consider his or her views. Tonight: Ask yourself if you are doing what you want to do.

 **LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)**
★★★ Be careful with funds, risks and an emotional relationship. Brewing confusion might cause a problem. You cannot win for losing right now. Don't get into anything you don't have to. Tonight: Go to the library.

 **SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)**
★★★★ You might be all smiles, but no one around you is in as jovial a mood as you, unless he or she is a Scorpio. Someone might be withholding information. A partner proves to be challenging. Let bygones be bygones. Tonight: Do your thing.

 **SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)**
★★ Your intuition, as well as what you are hearing, is off. Others might not be clear. Use all your steam, energy and frustration to get a job done or a project completed. You need to think rather than act on a personal matter. Tonight: Hide out.

 **CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)**
★★★ A money matter isn't as true blue as you would like. Stall, do research or just say no. Be careful handling your wallet and counting your change. Mistakes are easily made. Use your creativity, but don't act. Tonight: Hook up with a friend.

 **AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)**
★★ You are vague, which might be difficult for others to handle. Your sense of humor helps you get through some rough moments. Focus on your work and don't let others distract you. Tonight: Yes, uproar could surround your home.

 **PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)**
★★ You might come off a lot harsher than you realize. When you find yourself exchanging words, back off and think. You might not want this situation to get worse. Take the high road and detach. Tonight: Discuss alternatives with someone you trust.

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LOCAL



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Katrina survivors need new best friends

By Daily Press staff

A group of four-legged survivors of Hurricane Katrina are looking for new homes in Santa Monica.

The Santa Monica Police Department's Animal Control Division is offering for adoption five homeless dogs that were rescued from the area devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The dogs were among many that were recently transported from Louisiana by a team of veterinarians led by Paula Kislak, DVM. Among the five dogs are a shepherd mix, chow mix, labrador/pointer, rottweiler and labrador mix.

For information on adopting one of the dogs, or any other animal, call the Santa Monica Animal Shelter at (310) 450-6179.

St. Joe's receives 'Whole'-hearted donation

By Daily Press staff

Do you ever wonder where your change really goes after you drop it in the jar at the grocery store checkout?

At Whole Foods in Santa Monica, \$3,196 last month went to St. Joseph Center, a Westside social service agency.

The donation was the result of a grant from Food For All, a program of the Food Industry Crusade Against Hunger (FICAH), which fights to alleviate hunger and malnutrition worldwide. Whole Foods Market regularly collects money through customer purchases of Food For All cards, available at check-out counters.

This year, Whole Foods Market Santa Monica chose St. Joseph Center to be the recipient of their Food For All funds. The \$3,196 will help support the center's culinary training program, which is a free 10-week course that prepares low-income individuals to enter careers in the food service industry. Most culinary training program students live far below the poverty line. The training enables them to quickly enter the workforce and begin achieving stability and self-sufficiency.

SMC getting green with environmental classes

By Daily Press staff

Just how much impact do we humans have on the environment? Explore the answer this month at Santa Monica College.

This month SMC is continuing its "Environmental Issues Lecture Series" with two lectures, both free and open to the public. All lectures in the series are at 6:45 p.m. in the science lecture hall 145, 1900 Pico Blvd. Seating is on a first-arrival basis.

■ "The Ecopsychology of Personal and Planetary Healing" will be held Thursday, Nov. 3. It features SMC psychology professor Dr. Jackie Lanum, who will talk about the roots of new thinking and behavior in the science of ecological psychology.

■ "Effects of Globalization on Biodiversity" will be on Thursday, Nov. 10. Dr. Hartmut Walter of the UCLA Institute of the Environment raises concerns about globalization's impact on humans and the environment.

The series is sponsored by SMC's Center for Environmental and Urban Studies. The center — which is open to the public — features displays, a library and information center, video collection, native garden and other services and activities related to environmental and urban studies. SMC has been offering courses in environmental and urban studies since fall 2001. For information, call (310) 434-4743.

CLARIFICATIONS — In the Nov. 1 edition, the term "slush fund" was used in describing \$1,000 discretionary funds the City Council used to help pay for a local teacher to travel to China. The City Council's discretionary funds are just that. Slush funds refer to money being spent on corrupt or illegal practices.

Also on page 1, the headline over the photo of recently-painted arrows on Sixth Street insinuated that City Hall had ignored the incorrectly placed traffic arrows. It had not received any complaints.

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SURF REPORT

Some NW swell is due today from a system that formed near the Kamchatka Peninsula last week. The waves will hit waist high or so. Some chest-high set waves might be felt around standout west-facing breaks when the tide is right, which is also a problem with a six-foot high in the early- to mid-morning hours. Some lingering SW should stick around for waist-high sets around south facing beaches.

Write us at alex@smdp.com and tell us what the surf is doing today at your local break.

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	Morning	Height	Evening	Height	Morning	Height	Evening	Height
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TUESDAY	1:47	1.5	2:52	-0.1	8:02	6.0	9:02	4.3
WEDNESDAY	2:11	1.8	3:30	-0.3	8:27	6.2	9:47	4.0
THURSDAY	2:36	2.1	4:13	-0.4	8:56	6.3	10:39	3.7
FRIDAY	3:03	2.4	5:02	-0.4	9:30	6.3	11:43	3.4

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The Q Line

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Coastal areas around Los Angeles County last week received some of the worst statewide grades for water quality from nonprofit environmental group Heal the Bay. Environmental officials ascribed the county's low scores to a lack of enforcement of new environmental regulations.

So, this week, Q-Line wants to know, "What can local and county government agencies do to improve water quality and regulation compliance in Los Angeles County?"

Call (310) 285-8106 before Friday at 5 p.m. and we'll print your responses in the weekend edition. Please try to limit your comments to a minute or less. It might help to think first about the wording of your response.

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COMMENTARY

The Case Against 76

GUEST COMMENTARY BY SHARI DAVIS & LOUISE JAFFE

Halloween not as scary as November's ballot

What is truly frightening for the children of Santa Monica and Malibu, as well as for children throughout the state of California? The prospect of Proposition 76 passing.

Proposition 76 is a bad idea for many reasons, but first and foremost is the devastating impact it would have on public schools. If Prop. 76 passes, \$3.8 billion would immediately be eliminated from the minimum funding guarantee for schools. Our schools are already underfunded statewide. In the past 30 years, California school funding has declined from about \$400 above the national average to \$600 below the national average. The fifth largest economy in the world, California is now ranked 44th in the nation when it comes to school funding. Yet here we are again, facing another assault on funding for public education.

In describing Prop. 76, California's nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office is explicit:

"... (T)he state would no longer have to eventually restore the current maintenance factor obligation (\$3.8 billion)" and "This measure would result in a lower minimum guarantee for K-14 education compared with existing law..." For more information, log onto www.lao.ca.gov.

Gov. Schwarzenegger and the folks who designed the ad campaign for this election must not have noticed, however, because they are running a television commercial falsely claiming that Prop. 76 would help classrooms throughout the state.

So that's the second most frightening thing about this Halloween season — that the governor would stretch the truth so far that it crosses the line to dishonesty.

The third most frightening aspect of Prop. 76 is the unprecedented and unchecked power it would give the gov-

ernor — any governor — to slash budgets at any time of year. School districts need to plan for the school year. Students need to be able to count on classes being available throughout the academic year. Prop. 76 would give the governor, acting with no oversight or public input, the authority to make mid-year cuts that would force districts to cut budgets ... that means cut teachers and the classes they teach, in the middle of the year.

The Los Angeles Times in its editorial opposing Prop. 76, referred to "granting the governor substantial new power to unilaterally reduce state spending" as Prop. 76's "fatal flaw."

We believe that Californians want good public schools again. The Santa Monica-Malibu Council of PTAs and the California State PTA, made up of teachers locally and statewide; the city of Santa Monica, the Santa Monica-Malibu School Board, the League of Women voters and Community for Excellent Public Schools have all taken strong opposition positions on Prop. 76.

Here in Santa Monica and Malibu, our communities have repeatedly shown a fierce commitment to make high quality public education a top local and state priority. Again, we ask all registered voters to make sure your voice is heard and your vote is counted. Prop. 76 is currently failing in the polls but don't be lulled into a safety zone — the outcome of this election will depend on who actually gets out to vote next week. Please be sure to go to the polls and also encourage your friends and neighbors to be sure to vote on Nov. 8. Vote to protect public schools by voting "no" on Prop. 76.

(Shari Davis and Louise Jaffe are co-chairs of Community for Excellent Public Schools, a community-based organization dedicated to local funding for local schools.)

GUEST COMMENTARY BY LAURA ROSENBAUM

Saying 'yes' to 76 is saying 'no' to schools

As a PTA member who is deeply concerned with the education of all children in California, I am strongly opposed to Proposition 76 on the Nov. 8 special election ballot.

In an ironic counterpoint to California's academic standards — the most rigorous in the nation — California currently ranks as one of the most poorly-funded education systems in per pupil expenditure. As a result, our class sizes are among the largest in the country, and we have far fewer counselors, librarians, school administrators and school nurses than other states. Prop. 76 would ensure that this picture will not improve. Instead, Prop. 76 would result in major school funding cuts, hurting our children and our economy's competitiveness. If this measure passes, there will be a permanent loss to schools of \$3.8 billion. That is \$600 less for every child. The result would be more over-crowded classrooms; more teacher layoffs; more cuts in arts and music programs; fewer librarians, PE specialists, nurses and counselors; and fewer textbooks. And, in the long-run, Prop. 76 would produce graduating class after graduating class that is under-educated in comparison to students in other parts of this country, and certainly countries around the world.

We have worked hard in Santa Monica and Malibu to protect our school children from the effects of chronic underfunding by the state. We've done this by encouraging a partnership with the cities of Santa Monica and Malibu, resulting in significant ongoing funding to our local schools. And, our voters have approved local school funding measures, demonstrating this community's commitment to quality public schools for our children.

Despite this support, our local schools would not be left unscathed by Prop. 76. Prop. 76 would alter Proposition 98, passed by voters of California in 1988, which provides a constitutionally-guaranteed minimum level of funding for public education. Our public schools would become vulnerable to severe spending cuts, even disruptive mid-year cuts, year after year. These cuts would permanently reduce the minimum funding guarantee for schools as Prop. 76 would remove the state's existing obligation to restore funding to education when the economy improves.

Compounding my concerns about

threats to education, Prop. 76 would also eliminate our constitutional system of checks and balances. It gives the governor unprecedented powers, including the ability to unilaterally declare a fiscal emergency, and cut general fund spending across the board if revenues fall 1.5 percent or more below forecast levels. Under Prop. 76, budget decisions can be made by the governor and his or her political appointees behind closed doors, with no public hearings or accountability.

Prop. 76 would allow the governor alone to cut additional funding for schools in the middle of the year, creating havoc for local school budgets. When faced with mid-year budget cuts, school districts would not have the ability to release teachers due to contractual constraints. The need to reduce expenditures would therefore result in severe cutbacks in other areas including classified staff — special education aides, custodians, library assistants and office staff — as well as textbooks, supplies; and sports and other extra-curricular programs. This would mean that schools could not guarantee students a full and comprehensive program throughout a given school year. If our schools are to continue to focus on improving student achievement and meeting federal and state standards for all students, they must have a strong and stable source of funding.

Prop. 76 would not solve California's budget deficit. This was admitted by no less than the initiative's own sponsor during questioning at the Legislative hearing on Prop. 76 earlier this month. And, in a published report, California's non-partisan legislative analyst concurs, saying that this proposal will not halt autopilot spending, but rather increase it. She also cautions against such a serious diminution of legislative budget authority. Prop. 76 removes any incentive for the governor and the legislature to work together and does nothing to prevent tax hikes.

Prop. 76 won't solve our state's budget problems, but it will hurt our local schools, our children, and by extension, our communities.

On Nov. 8, make sure you vote to make your voice heard. I urge you to join with the California State PTA, and vote "no" on Prop. 76.

(Laura Rosenbaum is president of the Santa Monica-Malibu Council of PTAs.)



OPINIONS EXPRESSED are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect those of the Santa Monica Daily Press staff. Guest editorials from residents are encouraged, as are letters to the editor. Letters will be published on a space-available basis. It is our intention to publish all letters we receive, except those that are libelous or are unsigned. Preference will be given to those that are e-mailed to editor@smdp.com. All letters must include the author's name and telephone number for purposes of verification. Letters also may be mailed to our offices located at 1427 Third Street Promenade, Suite 202, Santa Monica, 90401, or faxed to (310) 576-9913. All letters and guest editorials are subject to editing for space and content.



About face



Fabian Lewkowicz/Daily Press

Halloween revelers scarf it down during a pumpkin pie-eating contest at the Police Activities League's PALloween event, held at the Barker Hangar at Santa Monica Airport on Monday. PALloween is intended to provide a safe environment for kids on Halloween.

Veterans out to protect what they claim is theirs

ANSWER CALL, from page 1

R. James Nicholson in Washington D.C.

The cards, which are being distributed throughout the community, ask citizens to officially oppose the commercial development proposal; support a 25-year master plan of the site and enhance services for war veterans.

"People started really realizing that there is a real potential for that land to be sold off," Landry said. "We are going out to the community however we can."

More than 3,000 people have signed the cards, which will be first given to Congressman Henry Waxman (D-Santa Monica) and then delivered to Nicholson. Nicholson is expected to make a decision on the future of the property early next year.

The group is worried that the PricewaterhouseCoopers report given to the Veterans Administration contains loopholes and could lead to major development on the property.

The site, bordered by the 405 Freeway, and San Vicente and Wilshire boulevards, currently contains the 800-bed VA hospital and outpatient treatment facilities. Other than that, the property remains largely unused.

"The services at the facilities have deteriorated," Landry said, adding that an estimated 1 million veterans live in the LA area. "Their therapeutic needs aren't being met."

There are 70 buildings on the property, many of which are closed or not being used to their fullest potential. What's more attempting to navigate through the VA system for health care and benefits is a nightmare, Landry said.

Citizens for Veteran Rights members say the Veterans Administration has turned their backs on soldiers who laid their life on the line for the country. And when they returned from combat wounded physically, mentally and emotionally, they expected the VA to take care of them. Instead, they are often met with bureaucratic red tape when applying for aid, or turned away and left to fend for themselves, Landry said. Hundreds of homeless vets sleep under empty buildings on the site and on nearby freeway exits.

"There are a lot of things out there that could be of great benefit to the vets," Landry said, adding that more veterans are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan injured with no established network to assist them.

The group is pushing for a guarantee that the West LA land will never be developed for anything other than veteran services, and that an assessment be done to determine what's needed on the site to adequately accommodate veterans' benefits.

"Our group intends to stay together and be a watchdog out there," Landry said.

Despite that the land was donated in 1888 as an old soldiers home intended to remain for the direct benefits of veterans, the West LA VA site has been eyed for commercial development for years.

Five years ago, a proposal to build a sports complex at the site surfaced. Citizens for Veteran Rights successfully fought against it. Now, they are thwarting yet another land grab.

"It's the most expensive property (the VA) owns," Landry said. "It may be one of the most expensive pieces of land outside of Central Park."



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Calling on VA leaders to 'honor spirit' of deed

BACKING VETS, from page 1

for the VA's struggling health care system, officials say.

The VA's consultant, PricewaterhouseCoopers, issued a report in September which assesses the VA grounds and provides eight options by which it may be renovated or re-developed to maximize use.

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers' 120-page report, the West LA grounds is among the largest health care campuses in the VA system. The nearly 400 acres has 91 structures totaling 2,807,039 in gross square feet. A law called the Cranston Act protects nearly one quarter of the grounds from being sold. In addition, eight organizations have agreements in place which limit what can be done to portions of the land for the next 10 to 40 years.

The report calls for upgrading aging buildings and increasing their ability to provide medical services. In addition, it's suggested that large tracts of land may be privatized and includes possibly constructing a private medical research institute on 20 to 30 acres; using dozens of acres to create a private mixed-use condominium building, as well as erecting a 60,000-square-foot medical office building.

However, Southland political leaders and hundreds of residents who participated in a Sept. 22 public meeting at the VA grounds feel the development option is no option at all. They blame an under-funded, maybe even mismanaged VA for its "underutilized" West LA facilities and say that veteran services are needed there more than ever. While a handful of attendees said they would be open to commercial development if it somehow addressed veteran needs, the vast majority were adamantly opposed to such a move. Some indicated it was the responsibility of the federal government to maintain the grounds, not private interest groups.

Some officials at the meeting also referred to a recent county report which indicates there are 17,000 homeless vets living on the streets in the metropolitan area. They also said more veterans may be arriving from American-occupied areas, who may need help getting on their feet.

Congressman Henry Waxman, Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and dozens of elected city officials whose jurisdictions are affected by the VA grounds, have all indicated they are against any proposal that would consider private development.

Waxman said suggestions to use the VA grounds for purposes that don't directly benefit veterans is unfortunate but not entirely unusual.

"There is a history of attempts by commercial interests to develop the West LA VA property," Waxman told the Daily Press. "Our veterans, community and elected officials have fought them strenuously and successfully in the past.

"We are firmly united in our opposition to any effort to use the VA campus for commercial purposes. This land belongs to our veterans."

Officials say it's crucial to convince the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, R. James Nicholson, that it would be a mistake to privatize portions of the VA grounds. In a letter to Nicholson dated Oct. 7, Waxman, several members of Congress, and Sen. Barbara Boxer and Sen. Diane Feinstein, all indicated the Secretary ought to consider six principles to guide him in re-evaluating the VA grounds' use.

Among the requests, the letter asks that Nicholson "honor the spirit of the 1888 deed from John P. Jones and Arcadia B. de Baker granting the land as an Old Soldiers Home by adopting the principle that in perpetuity the land must be maintained for the direct benefit of veterans."

Santa Monica City Councilman Richard Bloom said the fate of the VA is up to a handful of people in Washington. However, he said any move that would aim to privatize portions of the VA would be contradictory to its purpose.

"I think it's important to understand that the main issue is whether or not portions of the VA site are going to be used for commercial development, and it's very clear that there is virtually no support for that in the Los Angeles region," Bloom said. "We can only hope that the VA directors are hearing that message and that it would be a very counterproductive move for the site."

Officials say the VA will continue to consider public comment for the rest of the year on its re-evaluation process. Those interested in the issue are encouraged to send letters to Nicholson in Washington.

Hallucinogenic tea case is first religious freedom test for Roberts

BY GINA HOLLAND
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court debated Tuesday whether to let a small congregation in New Mexico worship with hallucinogenic tea, the first religious freedom dispute under Chief Justice John Roberts.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor seemed skeptical of the Bush administration's claim that the tea can be banned, but she may not be around to vote in the case.

About 130 members of a Brazil-based church have been in a long-running dispute with federal agents who seized their tea in 1999. The hoasca tea, which contains an illegal drug known as DMT, is considered sacred to members of O Centro

Espirita Beneficiente Uniao do Vegetal.

The Bush administration contends the tea is not only illegal but potentially dangerous.

The Supreme Court has dealt with religious drug cases before. Justices ruled 15 years ago that states could criminalize the use of peyote by American Indians. But Congress changed the law to allow the sacramental use in tribal services of peyote, a bitter-tasting cactus that includes the hallucinogen mescaline.

O'Connor pointed out during Tuesday's argument that Congress changed the rules. She interrupted the Bush administration lawyer in his opening statement and peppered him with difficult questions.

See **TEA TIME**, page 7

LOCAL □ NATIONAL

RAD reply: Developer revisits Bus Barn plans

RAD REPLY, from page 1

groups would be likely. In September, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's board of directors approved an agreement with RAD Jefferson, LLC, on plans to exchange MTA's 3.13-acre bus yard property located at Sunset Avenue and Main Street in Venice for construction of a new 4.66-acre transportation facility on Jefferson Boulevard in West Los Angeles.

The proposal called for constructing a 255,766-square-foot building at the Bus Barn site that would have been up to 56 feet tall, and include 214 condos and 20,000 square feet of commercial retail space.

However, members of a planning committee, part of the Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council (GRVNC), attended an Oct. 19 meeting in which they wrote 16 recommendations they wanted RAD to address before they'd sign off on the development. At the same time, Los Angeles 11th District Councilman Bill Rosendahl said he will not support the project, which is to be built within his jurisdiction, unless RAD receives a nod from the GRVNC, which hopes to become a revitalized community group during Rosendahl's term.

"I sat down with RAD and encouraged them to withdraw their application and begin having serious and meaningful discussions with groups in the community," Rosendahl said. "I also encouraged them to set aside a substantial amount of the site for affordable housing and (I) expressed concerns about traffic mitigation as well. "We'll see what happens."

The Venice property has been used by transit agencies for more than 100 years. However, it's inefficient, costing \$5 million a year in wasted drive time — the distance in miles a transit bus must travel before entering a revenue-generating area, according to MTA officials.

The Venice bus division accommodates 77 buses and can't handle clean-air natural gas (CNG) fueling. Before the

swap occurs, RAD Jefferson is to build MTA's new facility, which will include CNG fueling, according to the agreement. The new West LA facility will handle 150 buses — all of which will operate on CNG — according to MTA officials.

The Venice Sunset property is valued at \$12.9 million, and the agreement calls for MTA to kick in \$8 million to make up the difference in the cost of the new transportation center.

In a letter sent to the Los Angeles city planning department, Rosendahl indicated he has heard an outcry from constituents who oppose the RAD development. In particular, he has issues with exemptions the developer seeks for height, density and design.

The GRVNC's land use and planning committee voted (5-2) in favor of recommending 16 changes to RAD's proposal.

Among the design changes, the committee requested the building's maximum height be reduced from 56 to 35 feet. Commercial development would be broken up from one tenant occupying 20,000 square feet to 10 tenants occupying 2,000 square feet, committee members said.

In addition, the developer would be required to make several concessions for public benefit, including: An arts component added to the site; the expansion of sidewalks, bus, bike and other traffic mitigation measures; and the creation of a park area and community room.

Committee members said 20 percent of housing units should be designated for very low-income residents and 10 percent should be designated for moderate-income residents.

Calls to committee members were not returned.

Jody Litvak, regional community relations manager for the MTA, said the agreement with RAD would allow the transit agency to provide better service to users in which the buses would use cleaner gas.

Litvak said MTA has been working for 25 years to relinquish the Venice bus yard property.

Peyote case could be precedent

TEA TIME, from page 6

Other justices also seemed concerned by the government's claim that an exception could be made for peyote, but not for hoasca tea.

"That is a rather rough problem under the First Amendment," said Justice Stephen Breyer.

Justice Antonin Scalia, who wrote the 1990 peyote opinion, said tribes have been using peyote — "a demonstration you can make an exception without the sky falling."

The man nominated to replace the retiring O'Connor, Samuel Alito, has dealt with a variety of religion cases as an appeals court judge. He wrote a 1999 opinion allowing Muslim police officers to keep their beards and voted that year to permit a government holiday display containing a creche and secular symbols of the season.

Alito could be called on to vote in the religious tea case with a new argument session, if justices are divided 4-4 when O'Connor leaves the court. Her votes only count in cases decided while she is still on the bench. This case could take months to decide. "It's not clear how he would rule," said

Anthony Picarello, president of The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. "Normally religious freedom cases are tricky to predict. This one is especially tricky."

Bush administration lawyer Edwin Kneedler told justices that the drug not only violates a federal narcotics law, but a treaty in which the United States promised to block the importation of drugs including dimethyl-tryptamine, also known as DMT. The hoasca tea had been imported from Brazil.

He said other countries could back off the international war-on-drugs, citing lax U.S. enforcement of the treaty. Kneedler noted that the peyote used by American Indians is grown in America and used here.

The herbal hoasca brew is used in communion by the church, which has a blend of Christian beliefs and South American traditions. Members believe they can understand God only by drinking the tea, which is consumed twice a month at four-hour ceremonies.

The Supreme Court argument was lively, with the new chief justice a particularly active questioner. Roberts asked tough questions of both sides. He suggested that the Bush administration was demanding too much, a "zero tolerance approach."

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One-man Forest Service gets into the thick of it

BY JEFF DELONG

Associated Press Writer

RENO, Nev. — Back when Don Harris resigned as a deputy sheriff and signed on as a Forest Service cop, his recruiter told him to expect a change of pace.

“He said the Forest Service is going to be a little more boring than what you’re used to,” Harris recalls.

These days, Harris is the only federal law enforcement officer who regularly patrols nearly 1.8 million acres of national forest from north of Reno south to Mono Lake, Calif.

It’s a scenic and rural landscape with increasingly urban problems, including drug-fueled youth parties, illegal dumping, vandalism, assaults and even murder.

The job is not exactly the one Harris expected.

“Lo and behold, I’m almost back in a city beat,” said Harris, 37. “You could almost run a cop series on the stuff that we do.”

It’s a situation common across the West, particularly near fast-growing areas, said Joanne Tynon, a professor at Oregon State University who has studied crime on national forest land.

Increasingly, Forest Service officers like Harris are patrolling vast stretches of land, usually alone, and are encountering more of the types of crime expected on city streets, Tynon said.

Interviews first conducted in 1998 by Tynon and colleagues at eight different areas managed by the Forest Service determined that a wide range of crimes are occurring in the forest, often involving “urban spillover” activities, including gangs and drive-by shootings, rapes and assaults.

They expected marijuana cultivation to be an issue and weren’t disappointed. But they were surprised at the scope of methamphetamine manufacturing occurring on national forest land. Officers even reported evidence of satanic cult activity.

“I guess the bottom line is it’s a little frightening,” Tynon said. “You couldn’t pay me to do what they do.”

As a Forest Service officer, Harris expected to concentrate on resource-related crimes — illegal timber cutting, theft of archaeological resources and squatters living on public land.

Those things keep him busy. But what left Harris “totally surprised” was the level of potentially dangerous urban-type crimes he encounters.

This summer, while patrolling south of Reno, Harris came upon a pair of men smoking marijuana in the woods. They turned out to be drug runners transporting a load of heroin from Reno to Bishop, Calif.

Then there’s the gang activity of the type Harris so often dealt with in previous law enforcement jobs in New Mexico and El Paso, Texas.

“I thought I left all that gang stuff back there and here it is again,” Harris said. “I’ve dealt with the Mexican Mafia in the forest. They want to recreate, too.”

A year ago, the Forest Service discovered a garden of 2,000 marijuana plants growing in a drainage midway up Mount Rose, a short drive from Reno on the way to Lake Tahoe.

And there have been murders in the forested mountains west of Reno, all of them still unsolved. In 1982, the body of a still-unidentified woman who had been shot to death was found by hikers in the popular Tahoe Meadows near the summit of Mount Rose.

In March 2003, a snowshoer found the body of 29-year-old Luis Carlos Mireles-Quezada of Reno partially buried in snow off the Mount Rose Highway. He had been shot in the chest. Six months later, the body of 36-year-old Tammy Jean Brown of Reno was found on Forest Service land not far away in Thomas Creek Canyon. Investigators suspect Brown was strangled elsewhere and her body dumped in the woods, an increasingly common practice on public land.

The danger can be very real to officials patrolling the backcountry. During a recent set of interviews with Forest Service officers, the university researchers reported two-thirds of them said they had been threatened or attacked on duty.

In 1990, an unarmed female Forest Service ranger was attacked while patrolling a canyon on the edge of Reno. The woman came upon two men carrying assault rifles and was assaulted. The men hit the woman on the head with a rifle and attempted a sexual assault before fleeing. They were never caught.

Camped at Mount Rose Summit, Stan Musgrave of Vacaville, Calif., said he’s noticed changing behavior of

people while visiting public land in recent years.

There’s a place near Mammoth Lakes he used to like to visit but doesn’t anymore after he had problems with aggressive panhandlers. Another place Musgrave used to visit near Lake Shasta also is off-limits after he encountered squatters who made him uncomfortable.

“I didn’t like the looks of them, I have to be honest,” Musgrave said. “There are places I don’t go anymore. They’re changing.”

Across the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, which at 6.3 million acres is the largest in the lower 48 states, only six full-time and one part-time law officers are on the job.

Ed Monnig, the forest’s acting supervisor, said boosting the federal law enforcement presence on national forest land is a challenge.

“The budget constraints are real and we have to balance law enforcement with all our other needs,” Monnig said.

Complicating the matter is a general resistance to federal cops in many parts of the country, including Nevada, home to the “sagebrush rebellion,” Monnig said.

And bottom-line, “we’re never going to have enough people on the ground to keep up with all the criminal activity that’s out there.”

When asked if the situation worries him while on his solo patrols, Harris has a ready answer.

“I believe in tactical withdrawals, myself,” he said. “And I’ve got my radio. I’ve got backup if I need it.”

Chances are that backup will be the local sheriff’s office. Local law enforcement is increasingly being tapped to patrol public lands on overtime with the federal government paying the costs.

It’s a relationship becoming increasingly important as activity on public land intensifies, said Jim Lopey, assistant sheriff for Washoe County, pointing to growth in the Truckee Meadows area.

Criminal activity in the national forest is bound to increase as other communities in northern Nevada, the Sacramento Valley and the Sierra foothills continue to explode in population, said Rob Levy, undersheriff for Alpine County, Calif., south of Lake Tahoe.

“Just look at the growth,” Levy said. “They’re all coming here to play and those that have bad habits bring them.”

National forest trying out ‘green’ logging certification

BY JEFF BARNARD

AP Environmental Writer

GRANTS PASS, Ore. — Private timber companies have been getting “green” certifications for the past decade to boost sales among consumers who want to be assured that forests are not harmed by producing the lumber they buy.

Now the U.S. Forest Service, battered by court battles over balancing logging against fish and wildlife habitat, is looking into it.

A portion of the Fremont National Forest in southern Oregon and the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania will be the first of seven national forests to undergo an audit under the standards of two major systems: the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, developed by the U.S. timber industry, and the Forest Stewardship Council, an international group based in Germany that grew out of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The Forest Service said it is following a global trend to have third parties declare forest management as sustainable, and needs the public’s confidence as it faces new challenges, such as invasive species, global warming and combatting unauthorized off-highway vehicle trails. Wanting to go slowly, it will just go through the audit process, and won’t immediately seek final certification.

“Here we are providing advice to other countries and not even doing it on our own land,” said Sally Collins, associated chief of the Forest Service, from Washington, D.C. “It made us think we ought to at least test this, because it’s becoming an international language and we ought to be able to show we manage our forests sustainably.”

The sustainability standards address issues such as making sure new trees are growing to replace those that are cut, controlling erosion and protecting fish and wildlife habitat and clean water. The Forest Stewardship

Council standards go further to assure protection of social issues, such as sacred tribal sites; and economic considerations, such as maintaining longterm jobs, in addition to the environment.

The Collins Companies (no relation to Sally Collins), the first timber company in North America to win FSC certification, greened up its act to gain a marketing advantage, and hopes bringing in a third party to validate the national forests will break the gridlock that has crippled timber production from federal lands and allowed wildfires on national forests to damage private timber.

“I’m a fourth generation lumberman,” said Wade Mosby, senior vice president of the Collins Companies, which has headquarters in Portland. “What my dad and grandfather did is not accepted practice today. There is a balance. That pendulum needs to swing back. It needs to be done in a sustainable way, not a political manner. Let the professionals decide. That’s what this does.”

Environmental groups are wary, wondering whether standards for industrial forests can be translated to public lands where fish and wildlife habitat, clean water and recreation are supposed to get equal treatment, and whether this is laying the groundwork to toss out the environmental laws that have given them so many court victories.

“We are very skeptical this is going to be an adequate replacement,” said Mike Anderson, an analyst for The Wilderness Society. “Lots of people have said the Forest Service needs to rebuild trust with the public. That’s certainly true. But you know, I just don’t know whether certification has really improved public acceptance of private land logging practices.”

Robert Hrubes, senior vice president of Scientific Certification Systems, in Emeryville, Calif., will visit the Fremont National Forest in November with a team that will start looking at the Lakeview Cooperative Sustained Yield Unit, nearly 500,000 acres devoted to producing timber for local mills. They will look at paperwork, for-

est plans, and the forest itself to see if it is sustainable environmentally, socially and economically.

“Tens of millions of acres of state forest lands around the country have already undergone the process,” he said. “If it makes sense for a state department of natural resources to engage in certification, I don’t see why it wouldn’t make sense for managers of federal lands.”

Back in the late 1980s, when national forests were producing 12 billion board feet a year — a quarter of national lumber consumption — the Lakeview area had five mills working off the unit, which was turning out about 150 million board feet a year.

Collins’ Fremont Mill is the only one left, working mostly off timber grown on Collins’ own lands. Mosby said they have only been able to buy 5 million board feet a year off the unit in recent years, and much of that was killed by fire or insects, making it less valuable. He figures it could sustainably produce as much as 80 million board feet, 20 million board feet more than the Fremont Mill now uses. The audit will see if he is right.

Mosby said Collins got into certification after seeing a Danish lumber retailer shut down by protests over clearcutting tropical hardwood forests, and enjoyed a market advantage in the early going. That has mostly evaporated as the industry has followed suit, most of them with the less stringent SFI standard. But it is likely to become more of a factor as sustainability building standards — already common in commercial construction — are adopted in residential construction.

“It’s just like organic food,” said Mosby. “There is a certain segment that will pay extra to put organic or stuff with no pesticides in their body.”

“It has fundamentally changed the fabric of the industry,” said Catherine Mater, a forest engineering consultant in Corvallis. “It did so without the force of legislation or regulation behind it. It was a market-driven approach, a voluntary approach.”

NATIONAL



GOP enthusiastic about Alito; Democrats mulling filibuster

JESSE J. HOLLAND
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito is “clearly within the mainstream” and shouldn’t be filibustered, declared a Republican who helped fashion a plan limiting parliamentary roadblocks for judicial nominees.

Sen. Mike DeWine, who met with President Bush’s latest high court choice earlier Tuesday, warned Democrats he would side with GOP leaders to eliminate the judicial filibuster if the minority party uses it against the New Jersey judge.

“It’s hard for me to envision that anyone would think about filibustering this nominee,” said DeWine, an Ohio Republican who sided with 13 other Republicans and Democrats earlier this year to end a Senate stalemate over judicial filibusters.

Some Democrats were contemplating just such a move as the 55-year-old Alito began courting senators on the second day of his Supreme Court candidacy.

“The filibuster’s on the table,” Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer of California said after Bush announced that the U.S. Appeals Court judge was his pick to replace his previous unsuccessful choice, White House counsel Harriet Miers, as the successor for retiring Justice Sandra Day O’Connor.

Others are cautioning their colleagues against rushing to judgment. “Ordinarily it takes six to eight weeks to evaluate a Supreme Court nominee. We shouldn’t rush to judgment,” Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., the No. 2 Senate Democrat, said on CBS’ “The Early Show.”

DeWine, who met with Alito for more than an hour, is one of the 14 centrist senators Democrats need to sustain a filibuster. Without the group’s seven Republicans, Democrats would not be able to prevent Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., from abolishing judicial filibusters and confirming judges with a simple majority vote. The Republicans hold 55 of the 100 seats in the Senate.

DeWine made clear Tuesday that a Democratic filibuster would not have his support, saying he didn’t see how “anyone would think that this would constitute what our group of 14 termed ‘extraordinary circumstances’ that would justify a filibuster.”

“This is a nomination of a judge who is clearly within the mainstream of conservative thought,” he added.

The so-called “Gang of 14” will hold its first meeting on Alito Thursday.

The White House on Tuesday named former Indiana Republican Sen. Dan Coats and former Republican Party chairman Ed Gillespie to help guide Alito through his confirmation process. The two served in the same capacity for Miers, who withdrew her nomination last week

after some conservatives refused to fully support her candidacy and questioned whether she was qualified.

Conservatives are much more comfortable with Alito than they were with Miers because of his conservative track record as a federal judge, prosecutor and a Reagan administration lawyer.

Miers had never been a judge.

The nomination got Bush on the good side again of conservative and anti-abortion groups, who declared Alito a winner after opposing Miers.

James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family Action, said he was “extremely pleased,” and the anti-abortion Operation: Rescue declared that the country was on “the fast-track to derailing Roe v. Wade as the law of the land.”

Bush, who has seen his standing eroded by the insurgency in Iraq, rising fuel prices, Hurricane Katrina mistakes, the indictment of a top aide to Vice President Dick Cheney and Miers’ nomination, emphasized Alito’s work on “thousands of appeals” and “hundreds of opinions” when he introduced the candidate to the nation Tuesday.

“He has a deep understanding of the proper role of judges in our society,” Bush said at the White House. “He understands that judges are to interpret the laws, not to impose their preferences or priorities on the people.”

Alito pledged to uphold the duty of a judge to “interpret the Constitution and the laws faithfully and fairly, to protect the constitutional rights of all Americans, and to do these things with care and with restraint.”

Democrats, however, are deeply suspicious of Alito, with Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada, the party’s leader, wondering aloud “why those who want to pack the court with judicial activists are so much more enthusiastic about him” than Miers.

Alito upheld a requirement for spousal notification in an abortion case more than a decade ago, although Senate Judiciary Chairman Arlen Specter — an abortion rights Republican — insisted that doesn’t mean Alito would rule to overturn Roe v. Wade, the 1973 ruling that established abortion rights.

Earlier this year, with O’Connor casting the deciding vote, the high court threw out a death sentence that Alito had upheld in the case of a man who argued that his lawyer had been ineffective.

Republicans, meanwhile, returned to their insistence that all judicial nominees deserve hearings and confirmation votes.

“I expect the Judiciary Committee to conduct a fair and dignified hearing in a timely manner, followed by an up or down vote by the Senate,” said Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Bush’s first nominee this year, John Roberts, is now chief justice.

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Finding a contractor harder than it seems



DAYS ON THE MARKET

BY JODI SUMMERS

If you've ever considered minor renovations on a property — a modern reception area, or an updated bath or kitchen — you soon realize that it's really difficult to get a good contractor to do your small job.

"If we continue to be as busy as we've been over the past three years, small jobs become very undesirable," notes licensed contractor Orn Svenson. "Depending upon what my schedule is, a small job could be anything from fixing a warped door to a bathroom remodel."

Call seven contractors, maybe two will return your call. With interest rates having been so low and the value of property rising so steeply, a lot of money is being put into home improvement.

"I like to keep myself scheduled for three or four weeks out, but no more than that," notes contractor Kevin Mogan. "A lot of times, whether I return a call, or take a job is a matter of timing as much as anything else. I have to ask myself, 'What does my schedule look like for the next few weeks? Do I need more work?'"

Contractors will tell you that the way to get one of them to do your small job is to get a referral. Ask your associates, friends and family which contractors they use. When you call their contractor, leave the name of the person that referred you. Many contractors will do a small job to stay in the good graces of an established client.

Those in the business of properties — real estate agents, mortgage lenders, inspectors, appraisers — all have lists of people they refer out.

"When looking for a good contractor, recommendation is definitely the best way to go," notes contractor Ray Johnson. "At this point in time, contractors are lucky to be in a position to be able to pick and choose. If I'm not looking for work, I don't return calls, unless it's a referral."

Johnson, who has been doing contracting work for nearly 25 years, does only referral work. He started at carpentry, and continues to focus on that aspect of construction. He hires subcontractors for electrical, plumbing, tile and stone work.

"If you want to be really hands-on and get the best deal, ask your contractor who their subcontractors are," Johnson said. "Then, when you are negotiating on a price for the job, ask to see the supply estimates, as well as the price estimates from the subcontractors. Your contractor will think you know what you're doing and think several times before overcharging you."

Another way to find a contractor is to stop by properties that are currently being worked on. When you see a property under the construction, talk to the property owner and talk to the crew. People involved in construction know other people involved in construction. Many skilled

contractors don't need to advertise to find new business, so you may not find them through advertising.

"A word of advice, stay away from the bigger construction firms — they usually work for insurance companies," advises Johnson. "If a fire damages 20 houses, that construction firm might handle all of them, but their job is to get in and out of each property quickly as they can, for as economically as they can. If it's your property, you want someone who does quality work."

The Contractors State License Board advises that property owners:

■ Do deal only with licensed contractors.

■ Don't rush into the repairs, no matter how badly they are needed.

■ Don't hire the first contractor who comes along.

■ Do ask to see the contractor's "pocket license" or "Home Improvement Sales Registration."

All contractors are issued pocket licenses that show the type of trade in which they are licensed and the expiration date of the license. <http://www.cslb.ca.gov> also allows you to check the license status of a contractor.

"A lot of people who work as contractors don't have licenses, or the license is expired," observes Johnson. "If they don't have a license, they probably don't have insurance or workmen's comp, which puts all the responsibility on the property owner."

And Mogan offers this bit of advice: "Another way to find qualified people is through a local supplier — companies that sell electrical items, paint, doors and the like — and ask them for recommendations. Many contractors have accounts at their favorite supplier. Most suppliers have a list of people they feel at ease recommending. It keeps us accountable. If we don't do a good job, word will probably get back to the supplier."

Tomas Zahlten of Steven Ehrlich Architects suggests that when picking a contractor, choose one "who regularly works in your area on projects have a similar size and scope."

"If you have a kitchen remodel of a bathroom, you don't want to work with someone who specializes in rehabbing office space," he said.

Everyone you ask suggests you get at least three bids and ask for references. Specialists say you also have to find someone who has a personality you can work with.

The Contractors State License Board has a publication titled "What You Should Know Before You Hire a Contractor" to assist the public in making informed decisions when dealing with contractors. Order by calling 1-800-321-CSLB (2752), or download an order form on the Internet at www.cslb.ca.gov.

(Jodi Summers is director of the investment division at Boardwalk Realty Santa Monica. Contact her at jodis@boardwalkrealty.com, or call (310) 309-4219. Visit her community history Web site at www.santamonicalandmarks.com.)

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Vegas real estate soaring alongside buildings

BY KATHLEEN HENNESSEY
Associated Press Writer

LAS VEGAS — Its front windows wish you “Feliz Navidad” in paint that won’t wash off. The landscaping consists of four shriveling cacti and a patio piled with empty cat food boxes. Inside, it’s 700-square-feet of confirmed bachelor’s clutter. And it can all be yours for \$1.2 million — cash.

There’s perhaps no better evidence of the condo fever raging through Las Vegas’ real estate market than the asking price on Manuel Corchuelo’s home. Once considered deadlocked in the wasteland where the Las Vegas Strip fizzled into a decaying downtown, the World War II-era home is now happily nestled in the shadows of billions of dollars of new and proposed high-rise condominium projects. Corchuelo is sitting on much-coveted land.

From his front lawn, Corchuelo likes to smile up at the cranes and listen to the clang of construction.

“It’s a good sound,” he said.

The former catering waiter and Colombian immigrant bought the home in 1978 for \$30,000. He worked more than 20 years serving high rollers and convention-goers. He never married, saved some money and lost \$15,000 of it on the stock market. Ten years ago, he started reading about investors’ plans to build condominiums outside his door. He cut the clipping from the newspaper and put it in a three-ring binder.

A few years later, he put his house on the market.

At last count, there were 93 luxury condominium projects, totaling 175 towers, proposed, planned or under construction in the Las Vegas valley in the second quarter of this year, according to a report released in September by Applied Analysis, a Las Vegas-based consulting

firm. Though Brian Gordon, an analyst for the group, estimates that little more than one in three of the 93 will ever open its doors, 15 projects representing 10,000 units are expected to be completed by the end of next year.

Developers tout the boom as the Manhattanization of Las Vegas, the move to “verticality” instead of sprawl. They promise an urban lifestyle, skyline views and celebrity neighbors. They court the young, rich and out of town.

About 85 percent of condo buyers are non-Nevada residents or investors, Gordon said.

Most of the projects are huddled on or around the Strip.

“It’s sort of like beach-front property. They’re not making any more of it. Everybody that’s within a stone’s throw thinks their property is worth \$20 million an acre,” he said.

The hype is fueling increases throughout the city. The cost of a vacant acre in the Las Vegas area has hit \$601,600 — an 88 percent increase over last year.

Corchuelo’s home is one block off Las Vegas Boulevard and across the street from the future home of the Allure, a 41-story luxury complex under construction.

Five years ago, his initial asking price of \$350,000 attracted few offers. His agent dropped the listing. Corchuelo continued to collect articles about the market, filling three binders full of stories and notes handwritten in Spanish. He studied the moves of the city’s real estate tycoons.

“Even Trump makes mistakes,” he said, citing a sale he says cost real estate mogul Donald Trump millions. “You have to know the area. Steve Wynn, he knew what he was doing. He had experience — 20 years building hotels. He knows everything moves in cycles.”

Corchuelo found an agent who, like

him, is convinced they’re riding an upturn that hasn’t peaked. The pair has upped the asking price several times and are looking for a buyer who doesn’t need financing.

“It’s happening. It’s all going to keep going,” said Paul Miotke, Corchuelo’s agent. “The one thing we know is it’s not going down in value.”

Few would have said that about Corchuelo’s block just a few years ago. In the 1950s, the neighborhood was home to card dealers and strippers who used to sunbathe in the buff to avoid tan lines and earned the place its nickname, Naked City. By the 1980s, it had become a pocket of prostitution and crime.

Now, the streets around Corchuelo’s home are lined with a mix of small, well-kept homes, residential hotels and public housing. Visitors are as likely to see speculators and real estate agents cruising the place as pimps.

In 2000, the city removed building height and parking restrictions in an attempt to lure development to the area. It took a few years, but builders eventually began to eye Naked City for what planners call “higher intensity housing units.”

“We had to expect there would be developers seeking to consolidate smaller properties,” said Margo Wheeler, the director of planning and development for the city of Las Vegas.

That’s where Georgia James comes in. She’s a Prudential agent who cruises the neighborhood in her bronze Cadillac DeVille daily. She calls herself the mayor of Naked City and is one of several people coveting Corchuelo’s property. James says she has bought and sold more than 200 properties in Naked City, some of them five times. She’s just finished assembling a 5-acre site on behalf of a group of Miami investors. The plot includes 150 feet of Strip-front property

and backs up to Corchuelo’s parcel. It’s listed at \$10 million an acre.

James says she doesn’t need Corchuelo’s plot, but it would be nice. She thinks his asking price is unrealistic.

“He’s basing it on the highest price paid for the top property on the Strip. If Wynn paid \$250,000 a square foot, Manuel wants \$250,000 a square foot,” she said. The house next door sold about six months ago for \$520,000.

Corchuelo thinks the owner should have held out for more.

James says she hates to see the 64-year-old man waste time.

“He’s so old and he’s sick. He’s going to end up dying, and he has no children or anything else,” she said, as she drives down Corchuelo’s street. “So, what is he trying to do? They can build around him.”

It’s been done before, she said, adding that tide of development will likely consume all of Naked City in the next decade. The low-income housing will have to be relocated. The flop houses will be leveled to make way for progress.

“You can’t have slums next to your high-rises. I think the city’s got to find land and give it to these people,” she said. “But this land, this is too close to the Strip, it has too much potential.”

Corchuelo isn’t the only thorn in James’ side. A handful of Naked City holdouts — some residents, some California investors — are keeping her from assembling the neighborhood like a puzzle. She dismisses most.

“It’s part of my job. I’m patient,” she said.

And so is Corchuelo.

“I’ve been waiting 30 years for this,” he said, adding that he knows exactly what he’ll do with the money once he sells.

“Buy another house,” he said.

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NATIONAL



Bush asks for \$1.2 billion, has bird flu on mind

BY LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON — President Bush outlined a \$7.1 billion strategy Tuesday to prepare for the danger of a pandemic influenza outbreak, saying he wanted to stockpile enough vaccine to protect 20 million Americans against the current strain of bird flu.

The president also said the United States must approve liability protection for the makers of lifesaving vaccines. He said the number of American vaccine manufacturers has plummeted because the industry has been hit with a flood of lawsuits.

Bush said no one knows when or where a deadly strain of flu will strike but "at some point we are likely to face another pandemic."

The president, in a speech at the National Institutes of Health, said the United States must be prepared to detect outbreaks anywhere in the world, stockpile vaccines and anti-viral drugs and be ready to respond at the federal, state and local levels in the event a pandemic reaches the United States.

Bush outlined a strategy that would cost \$7.1 billion including:

- \$1.2 billion for the government to buy enough doses of the vaccine against the current strain of bird flu to protect 20 million Americans;
- \$1 billion to stockpile more anti-viral drugs that lessen the severity of the flu symptoms;
- \$2.8 billion to speed the development of vaccines as new strains emerge, a process that now takes months;

• \$583 million for states and local governments to prepare emergency plans to respond to an outbreak.

In asking Congress for money to buy vaccine, Bush said the vaccine "would not be a perfect match to the pandemic flu because the pandemic strain would probably differ somewhat from the avian flu virus it grew from. But a vaccine against the current avian flu virus would likely offer some protection against a pandemic strain and possibly save many lives in the first critical months of an outbreak."

He also said the United States was increasing stockpiles of antiviral drugs, such as Tamiflu and Relenza. Such drugs cannot prevent people from catching the flu, but they can reduce the severity of the illness when taken within 48 hours of getting sick, he said.

"At this moment there is no pandemic influenza in the United States or the world, but if history is our guide there's reason to be concerned," Bush said. "In the last century, our country and the world have been hit by three influenza pandemics, and viruses from birds contributed to all of them."

He pointed out that the 1918 pandemic killed over a half million Americans and more than 20 million people across the globe. "One-third of the U.S. population was infected, and life expectancy in our country was reduced by 13 years."

"The 1918 pandemic was followed by pandemics in 1957 and 1968, which killed tens of thousands of Americans and millions across the world," Bush said.

Bird flu has been documented in Asia and has spread to Europe but has not reached the United States, the president said.

ident said. "Our country has been given fair warning of this danger to our homeland and time to prepare," he said.

Bush said the cornerstone of his strategy was to develop new technologies to produce new vaccines quickly. "If a pandemic strikes, our country must have a surge capacity in place that will allow us to bring a new vaccine online quickly and manufacture enough to immunize every American against the pandemic strain," Bush said.

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NATIONAL

Katrina destruction plays into Washington state gas-tax revolt

BY DAVID AMMONS

Associated Press Writer

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Hurricane Katrina is figuring prominently in the campaign for a gas-tax revolt thousands of miles away.

As post-Katrina gasoline prices hover near the \$3 mark in parts of the West, Washington state voters have a chance on Nov. 8 to overturn a 9 1/2-cent gas tax hike the governor and lawmakers green-lighted in a rush of optimism a few months ago.

But Gov. Christine Gregoire and other advocates of an ambitious new 16-year transportation plan are specifically raising the specter of Katrina's destruction of New Orleans as a sales pitch for keeping the \$5.5 billion tax increase.

The Gulf Coast devastation underscored the need to get ready here, the governor said. In the West, that means preparing for the Big One — an earthquake that could sink Washington's floating bridges or topple Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct, a double-decker bayshore freeway that carries over 100,000 motorists a day.

Computer models show the viaduct collapsing or toppling in a quake and other bridges also are considered at risk.

"The viaduct is our levees," Gregoire said, drawing a direct parallel between the rickety viaduct and the levees that left New Orleans vulnerable. "The earthquake is our hurricane."

But critics of the largest highway tax hike in state history say it's a bad, bloated program that won't fix congestion. And they say using the Katrina angle is an unseemly scare tactic.

Initiative 912 would largely undo the Democratic Legislature's multibillion-dollar transportation fix. More

than 400,000 voters, stirred by conservative talk radio and sticker shock at the gas pump, qualified the measure in near-record time.

Pollsters have produced conflicting results. Independent pollster Stuart Elway reports a steady erosion of support for a measure that many once considered a slam dunk. His September poll shows it failing; other pollsters have it ahead.

Initiative foes have launched a media campaign that will top \$2 million, with financing from Bill Gates and Microsoft, Boeing and other heavy hitters. They're out-gunning the proponents 10-to-1.

The initiative would erase a 3-cent increase that went into effect in July, as well as the increases that lawmakers approved in advance for the next three years.

The new tax, fully implemented, would cost the average driver about \$1 a week more, the state Department of Transportation calculates.

If repealed, the tax would revert to the old rate of 28 cents a gallon. At the current 31 cents, Washington is tied for eighth highest.

The campaign follows Oklahoma voters' overwhelming rejection of a nickel-a-gallon increase last month.

In many states, governors and lawmakers are considering rebates or tax freezes to ease the pain of soaring gas prices. Washington Republican lawmakers requested a three-month suspension of all state gas taxes. Gregoire and Democrats rejected that.

In September, Oklahoma voters overwhelmingly defeated a nickel increase in the price of gas, and eight cents for diesel. The initiative, the state's first since 1987, was proposed to raise money for road and bridge repairs.

Also in September, Hawaii's wholesale gas prices

Gas tax support sputtering?

By The Associated Press

VOTER INITIATIVE: Washington state voters have a chance on Nov. 8 to overturn a 9 1/2-cent gas tax hike the governor and lawmakers approved a few months ago.

BACKERS SAY: The money will help fund a new 16-year transportation plan that is expected to prepare the state's transportation infrastructure for an earthquake.

CRITICS SAY: It's a bad, bloated program that won't fix congestion and costs motorists too much.

were tied by state law to those of select mainland markets, an attempt to save island motorists from unfair prices at the pump.

The Washington state initiative would erase \$5.5 billion in gas tax revenue and bond proceeds over the next 16 years, gutting the most ambitious construction program ever approved for Washington.

The plan included money for 274 highway and bridge projects in every corner of the state, including \$2 billion for the viaduct.

I-912 sponsors say the big tax hike was overly ambitious, particularly given the pinch of gas prices and the jittery economy. Without giving specifics, they insist that Olympia should make better use of existing revenue.

The runaway prices at the pump "do help our cause," said organizer Brett Bader. "People are struggling."

Treating bear like one of the family runs afoul of Oregon law

By The Associated Press

COOS BAY, Ore. — For nine days, Rocky and Jonathan Perkett heard a lone black bear cub wail from its hiding spot in a Coos County logging site.

They could drop a tree on it or rescue it. They chose the latter, and for two years the bear was like family. But when the authorities got wind of it, there was trouble a-bruin.

The father and son named her Windfall and raised it for two years. They shared pizza and soda with the bear and gave her free rein of their home in the woods outside Coos Bay. The bear slept in Jonathan Perkett's bed, took showers and even had her hair blow-dried, Rocky Perkett said.

"We're not lying about it," said Rocky Perkett, 54. "We lived with her. We loved her. We treated her like a daughter."

But that's illegal in Oregon, and last week police raided their home and took Windfall. The men face possible

charges for holding the bear without permits and in an unlicensed facility.

"The law says you can't hold wild animals in any way," said Wildlife Administrator Ron Anglin of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The Perketts maintain Windfall never was "held" or locked in a cage. They simply opened their house to her, Rocky Perkett said. She could come and go at will, and even learned to work the doorknobs, he said.

"Is there a law against a bear running around in your yard?" Perkett said.

The Perketts plan to hire an attorney and hope a glitch in the Oregon State Police's search warrant will get the case tossed out — and, in the best of cases, get Windfall returned to them.

"Everything they done here was illegal," Rocky Perkett said. "Since it's all illegal, I hope they will bring her back."

No citations have been issued but holding a bear without a permit is punishable by up to a year in jail and a

\$6,350 fine.

Meanwhile, the bear has been shipped to a California Department of Fish and Game holding facility, where it will remain until the case is concluded. The bear's likely future is at a zoo or a permanent holding facility, Anglin said. The bear likes people too much to be released into the wild, he said.

Perkett acknowledged there's little chance of getting Windfall back. But he hopes good intentions and lack of understanding of the law will discourage prosecution.

"We're hicks. We're mountain men," Perkett said. "We took her because she was dying and we loved her. The only thing we did wrong was love one another."

Wildlife biologist Stuart Love, who helped tranquilize and seize the bear, said he doesn't doubt it. He said people's attachment to wild animals makes such seizures "the worst part of my job."

"You could see the hurt in those guys' eyes when we took it," Love said. "But there's no way we could leave that bear with them. It could end up killing someone."

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INTERNATIONAL



Premiers, governor share energetic reaction

By The Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Premiers of Canada's western provinces and Alaska's governor have agreed to push forward with plans for the Alaska Highway natural gas pipeline project.

After a meeting hosted by British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell, the group agreed to have their energy ministers develop a strategic action plan aimed at preventing delays in the long-discussed pipeline, which they said was crucial to North American prosperity and energy security.

In a prepared statement, they called for good-faith negotiations in Canada between the North Slope producers and Canadian pipeline operators to ensure speedy construction of the line.

"I'm extremely pleased that my colleagues and I are working cooperatively and collectively to ensure the success of the project," said Yukon Premier Dennis Fentie, who chaired the meeting.

Campbell, who noted 25 percent of the project will be within British Columbia, said working together creates an opportunity to coordinate regulatory approvals with Ottawa more effectively.

"It is important that we work together to help ensure the expeditious and effective development of these pipelines and we think that Alberta's existing natural gas export hub provides the most economic means of getting natural gas to multiple markets," he said.

Alaska Gov. Frank Murkowski said Monday's meeting was part of the effort to ensure a "coordinated expe-

ditious process for the project in Canada."

"The best way to avoid delay in Canada is to resolve regulatory, aboriginal and operational issues with Canadian pipeline operators," he said.

Work on the project has been largely stalled since last spring on the Mackenzie gas part of the pipeline project over oil companies' complaints they were being asked to pay hundreds of millions of dollars for social programs and land rights they claimed governments should be covering.

Observers worried the obstacles could delay the project by two years, costing consumers billions of dollars due to higher natural gas prices.

The Mackenzie pipeline consortium is to let regulators know in November whether they'll be able to proceed to the next stage.

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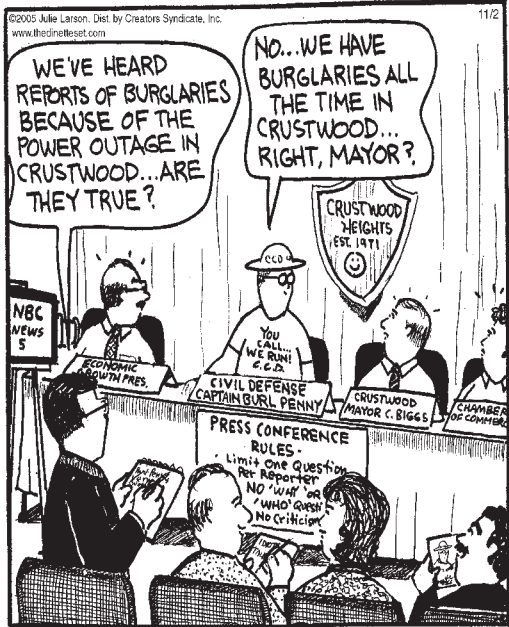


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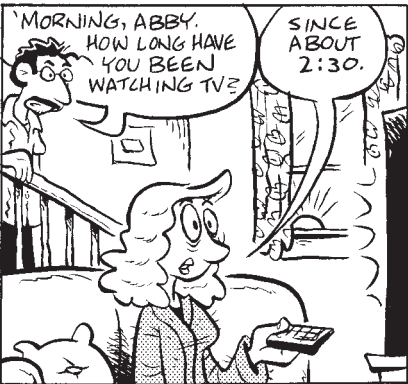


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The Dinette Set by Julie Larson



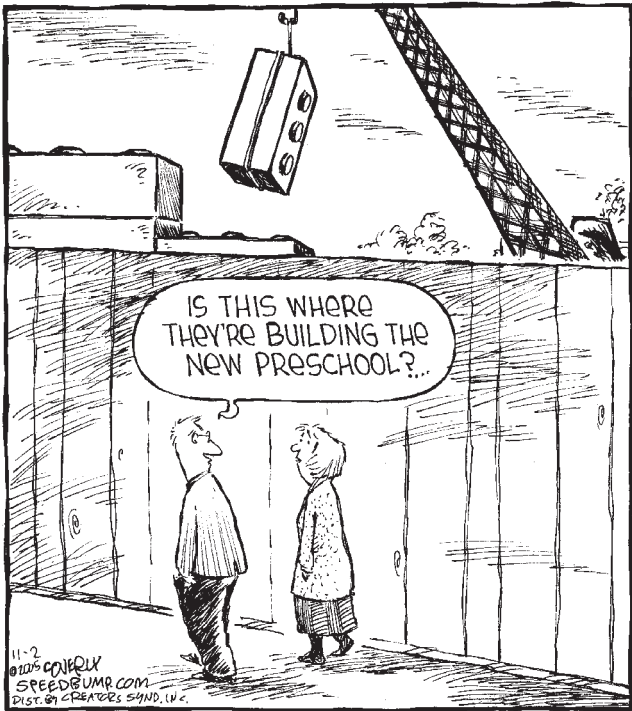
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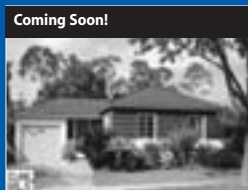
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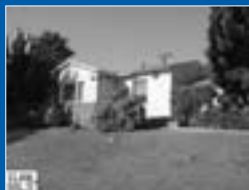
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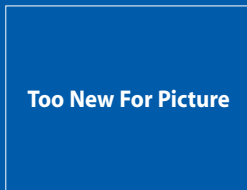
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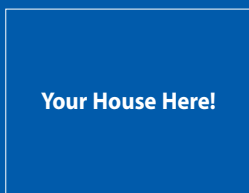
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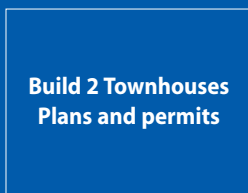


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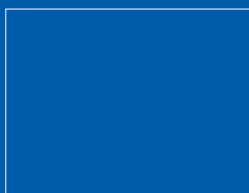
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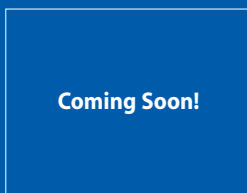


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